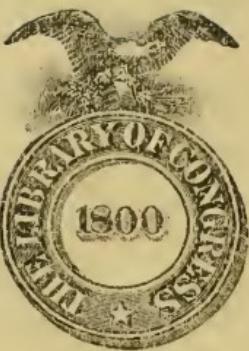


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# The Fire *o* Romance





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# THE FIRE *of* ROMANCE



# The Fire of Romance

*An Imaginative Play in One Act*

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Written for the Cactus Club of Denver, by  
James Grafton Rogers and performed  
by the Club in its outdoor theatre  
in the Rocky Mountains,  
September 6, 1919

PRINTED FOR THE CACTUS CLUB, DENVER : 1920

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## NOTE

THE fantastic text of this little play demands some explanation.

It was designed as the framework of an hour's performance to be given on a stream-bank in the open air. The text was embroidered with the sensations associated with the immense mountains surrounding the theater, a spruce forest, canyon echoes, and the trickle of tiny waterfalls across the stage. The site was entirely natural, the only structure on the stage being a low stone fire-place. With elaborate but inconspicuous lighting facilities, and a stage as wide and deep as the mountain side, it was possible to play upon the sensations with distant voices and torches in the woods, hidden music, water reflections, campfires scattered in the background to suggest an army bivouac, strange green flares among the evergreens, and bursts of red flame when the fire was fed by "understanding hands." These embellishments, brilliant costuming, and good amateur acting were the body of which this text was only a skeleton. It should be noted in connection with the closing lines that the lights of Denver,

twenty miles away and half a mile below, were visible almost from the auditorium.

The characters are those of local history. Coronado, the most romantic of the Spanish explorers, visited the southern Rocky Mountains about 1840. He left the Spanish settlements in Mexico guided by Friar Marcos de Niza, who was supposed to have seen the seven rich cities of Cibola, which the venturers hoped to sack. When these cities turned out to be mere Indian pueblos, Coronado penetrated further northeast into the prairie country, in search of another fabled metropolis, Quivira. He found only Indian wickiups, and the great herds of what his chroniclers called "hump-backed oxen."

Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike represents the romance of the American republic. He entered these same mountains in 1806. No explorer ever suffered physical and mental distress more intense. The reference in the lines to the Aaron Burr conspiracy is based on a much-discussed mystery surrounding Pike's mission. Many historians believe the accusation.

Dr. Edwin James, who typifies the drama of science, was the botanist of the government expedition to Colorado, led by Major Long, in

1820. The peaks bearing the names of Long and James are visible from the Club campsite. James may be considered the first scientist to study the Rocky Mountains, and his lines originated in the passages in his book which celebrate the discovery of the blue western columbine.

George Jackson, a prospector from Californian scenes, made the first substantial gold discovery in Colorado, near Idaho Springs, in the winter of 1858-1859, under the circumstances which the play recounts. His discovery launched the era of commercial development. Jackson's route in and out of the mountains must have passed near the spot which the Club uses as its theater.

The play is printed as the record of a September evening among great mountains, and of an amateur experiment in the outdoor theater. It has no other claims.

J. G. R.

# CAST

(With the players and staff of September 6, 1919)

The Romance of Spain, 1540—	
Coronado.....	Forrest S. Rutherford
The Romance of the United States, 1806—	
Pike.....	William W. Grant, Jr.
The Romance of Science, 1820—	
James.....	E. Clinton Jansen
The Romance of Commerce, 1859—	
Jackson .....	Hugh McLean
<hr/>	
Voice in the Woods.....	Edward C. Stimson
Boy Scout.....	Irvin J. McCrary
Friar Marcos.....	Robert G. Bosworth
Cardenas, a Spanish Captain.....	Charles T. Sidlo
Castaneda, another.....	Robert L. Stearns
Spanish soldiers.....	
.....	Caldwell Martin, LeRoy McWhinney
Indians.....	Henry F. Hitch, J. Delano Hitch
Incidental Music....	Ralph Hartzell, C. H. Hanington
Composed by John H. Gower, Mus. Doc. Oxon.	
Mechanics and Lighting.....	Fred W. Hart
Theater Staff. {	Allen True, John S. Collbran, Dudley
	Hart, R. H. Hart, Edmund B. Rogers
Site by courtesy of G. L. Baird	

## THE FIRE OF ROMANCE

*A glen in the middle heights of the Rocky Mountains. The foreground is a grassy bench between high stream-banks, across which trickles a rivulet, scarcely surviving the summer. In the background the stream emerges from the gloom of spruce trunks, and tumbles down through ferns on little stages to the feet of the audience. There is a sense of solitude and refuge in the scene; for it is not a forest glen, but simply a sheltered angle in a country of wide spaces and exposed mountain heights. Twilight. In the foreground fire embers, with a thread of smoke from a rough fireplace.*

*The foliage sways a little in the breeze that always follows sunfall in the open western country, and as if out of the leaves comes very simple music. Then a voice chanting. A faint green phosphorescence begins among the tree trunks, as if to suggest some immaterial woodland presence. It silhouettes the trees like a wide swamp light.*

**A VOICE IN THE TREES:**

After the light, westward the night  
    Hurries and must!  
Scurrying after day, out of the shadows' way  
    One little gust!  
Silver that tips the spruce, gold that the skies  
    produce—  
    Is that their quest?  
Such are the dreams that keep men from their  
    troubled sleep,  
    Journeying west.  
On, on, laboring on,  
Minutes and winds and man!  
Over the pine and the columbine,  
Beating west since the world began.

Canyon and hill, answer who will,  
    Where the world goes!  
What does it hope to find, sweet as if left behind,  
    Cedar and rose.  
Striding and brushing by harebell or dragon-fly,  
    Meadow or crest,  
Sunbeam and caravan, great hours and little man,  
    Journey on west!  
On, on, shadow and dawn,  
Never return nor fail!  
But the souls of men stray back again,  
If they ever have trod this trail.

*A boy's voice on the hill to the left interrupts the music, which, unnoticed, after a little*

*subsides. A Boy Scout, with his hat and one shoe lost, his knapsack straps broken, and a torn semaphore flag in his hand, slides disconsolately down the stream-bank. He does not speak after he reaches the stage, but it is evident that he is lost in the mountains. He sits down in the foreground to bandage his foot with a bandana; then starts up as if he heard a call behind. After listening intently, he relaxes discouraged, as he seems to have done a dozen times before; starts to call, but stops as if hesitating to break the silence. The dusk deepens. Noticing its intensity, he starts to the right to climb the opposite stream-bank, but stumbles, slides back, and lies huddled for a minute, with a sob or two.*

*His bare foot has met a curious obstruction. He rises with a battered Spanish helmet in his hand, and, with a little gasp, his mind flooded with gorgeous scraps from the history of the Great Adventurers, he holds the casque up to catch the light on its unrusted points. He claps it on his head, mounts a rock, and strikes an attitude, drawing an imaginary sword to a salute. He is boyish and ridiculous, but in the tide of world-old emotions. He looks more*

*closely about on the ground, and finds the broken stock of a musket, and then a battered tin cup and the horns from a buffalo skull.*

*Gathering his treasures in his arms, he piles them on a rock in the foreground, and, as he does so, burns his foot in the embers of the fire. He is a little startled, but his trophies again catch his fancy, and, with the helmet over his eyes, the gun-stock, the flag, the cup, and the horns in his arms, he leans against the rock, wrapped in dreams of old romance, and nods to sleep.*

*Darker. A bar or two of the music. Faint in the distance, a Spanish marching-song sung by many coarse voices.*

SONG:

The moonlight lamps on Spanish camps  
Pitched all around the world;  
At eventide on every wide  
Sea, Spanish sails are furled.

March on, my lads, march on!  
On mountain and on plain  
'Mid gayety and pain,  
Till every headland knows the tread  
Of the Venturers of Spain—  
Of the Venturers of Spain!

*In the spruce background the clank of armor and the flicker of approaching torches. There is a rustle of great numbers of men and animals approaching, faint voices, orders, and torches behind and on both sides of the stage. Winding among the pines from the distant background come a group of Spanish soldiers, led by an almost naked Indian, with breech-clout and a red forehead band, bow and pine torch. Behind him a cloaked officer with mantle, sword, gilt breast-plate, and plume. Then a soldier with a standard, a friar, another Indian with a torch, and three or four more troopers and officers with cross-bows, swords, and helmets.*

CORONADO (*the cloaked officer, in gilt armor. He is magnificent, but a little pitiful throughout the play.:*) :

Hold!

CARDENAS (*one of the captains; calling back*):  
Hold!

(*Trumpets in the woods.*)

VOICES IN THE DISTANCE:

Hold! Hold!

(*Coronado reaches behind him for the standard, unfurls the heavily embroidered silk banner of Spain, and plants it with his left hand, posing*

*with his sword in his right, like the boy. The torch-bearers drop naturally to the two sides of the stage, and, until the end, the impression is given that they tend their torches, dozing silently at the front margins of the stage, screened by trees.)*

CORONADO:

By conquest, these dominions, hill and plain,  
I claim and occupy for Charles of Spain.  
The groves, the torrents, and Cibola's towers;  
The shaggy, hump-backed oxen, and the flowers—  
Whate'er is rare and blood-stained, rich and brave;  
All that men murder for and monarchs crave,  
By sword and by the Virgin's grace to me,  
I claim for his Most Catholic Majesty!

*(Turning.)*

Cardenas! Castaneda! Marcos! All!  
Here we encamp, lest more from hunger fall.  
Once more go post your sentries! Set the fires  
alight!  
No conquest of Quivira for tonight!

*(The officers and soldiers salute and depart in several directions. There are orders and noises in the dark, and the gleam of fires in the wood.)*

CARDENAS:

Yes, captain!

CASTANEDA:

Yea!

FRIAR MARCOS:

My Lord, I go to pray,

The saints may not withhold Quivira one more day!

(*They are all gone.*)

CORONADO (*after a moment, throwing off his pose and leaning on his sword*):

O Coronado, fool I was, and stay,  
Though centuries erode the hills away!  
Four hundred years agone, and e'en this wood  
Was seed or saplings when my army stood  
Molded in flesh and panting up this height—  
Four centuries, while mountains melt from sight!  
And yet so vain does Coronado walk  
That just the pine-smell and the water-talk  
Prompt him to re-enact with solemn face  
Pageants so old the stars have shifted place.  
Oh, what a legion did I marshal then—  
Cross-bows and cannon, jingling mules, and men  
Baited by sordid dreams, crusading forth  
To sack the Seven Cities of the North!  
Tilting like some proud breaker for the land,  
We slushed in silly ripples up the sand.  
The fabled cities sunk to huts of clay,  
Where naked paupers lolled the months away.  
Tell me what venturer ever grasped his prize,  
Or more than spread the book for others' eyes!  
We scale the summits, always to unmask  
Still loftier summits for another's task.

(*Looking about.*)

Once, in the years, I kindled here a fire

That, like a sexton's candle in the choir  
Of some gloom-towered cathedral, did impart  
Small aid to vision, but did melt my heart.  
The glen, the embers, seemed in my despair  
The sweetest refuge God made anywhere.  
And, summer after summer, when my breast  
Heaves sea-like in the swell of old unrest,  
I dream I gather up my clans some night  
And march to set mine ancient fire alight.

*(He finds the ashes of the fire, and nurses them to a glow.)*

Here does it smolder till I come again—  
An altar to the proud romance of Spain!

*(He breaks the flagstaff over his knee, and feeds the banner and the staff carefully to the flames, which mount in a red flare.)*

With fuel like this, O little western fire,  
The blaze of venture never can expire—  
The oak of gay Castile and arms of Spain  
Broidered with blood of men and water-stain.

A SOLDIER'S VOICE (*challenging*):

Hold! Who comes to Spain?

*(A confused and indistinct answer; further challenges, and a soldier appears, with a torch and a youthful prisoner, clad in a tattered American uniform of 1806; his feet bound in buffalo skins, snow on his shoulders, and a skin cap and musket.)*

SOLDIER:

My general, a straggler from the dark.

CORONADO:

Who are you, stranger? Whence did you embark?

PIKE (*a defiant soldier*):

Spaniard, Lieutenant Pike your service waits.

I bear the arms of the United States.

Who are you? Sentries that I post would feel  
Unarmed in armor.

CORONADO:

Coronado of Castile.

PIKE:

I know your memory; but the balsam fir  
Has grown and perished where your footprints were.

CORONADO:

I know not of you, nor the flag you say.  
These hills are Spain. The prudent keep away.  
No firelight flickers here, save what I lit  
In eons past, and I, by nursing it,  
Maintain for youth, for poets, and the race  
The glamour and romances of this place.  
Such is my nation's part. I know you not.

PIKE (*advancing*):

O Coronado, when your fire was dim,  
I plodded westward here and kindled him.  
You gave the flame of Spain; I brought the stout  
Heart-wood of Saxons, as it smoldered out.  
From that great stream you never saw, my band

Struggled up prairie stream-beds in the sand,  
Hungered and frost-lamed, for a nation's gain  
That ponders still our mission and our pain.  
Then from the prairie nothingness there broke  
A sudden great Blue Peak. Our hopes awoke.  
Through winter ranges on our naked feet  
We labored, starving but for bison meat—  
Sending as messages, our tale to tell,  
Bones from the frozen feet of men who fell.  
That peak my name attained, but never I!  
It stands with our cold courage in the sky.  
Come, comrade! Can this stripling nation share  
No gleam of glory from your ancient flare?  
Surely, these summits, and these bold stars, too,  
Gleam to our youth for us no less than you!

CORONADO:

Young soldier, no adventurer can press  
Another from his fire in wilderness!  
It sinks. Come mend it!

PIKE:

Yes.

*(Advances to the fire.)*

And make it glow

The brighter for the documents I throw—  
Orders to make a new frontier, but now  
Performed and written on a mountain's brow.

*(The fire blazes red as he tosses in a bundle of documents.)*

CORONADO:

I pondered, sir, as you drew near, unseen,  
What slumbered in this room of evergreen  
And fern—what here, 'mid all the majesty,  
Seems speaking loudest of a world to be.

PIKE:

I sense it, too.

CORONADO:

The spruce shapes into city towers. Here lurk  
The sounds of people at their daily work.  
Strange monsters whistle in the gorge afar,  
And starlight twinkles where no planets are.

PIKE:

I know. And sometimes in the morning blue—

CORONADO:

Aye, throbbing, wide-winged birds I never knew.

SENTRY (*jumping to his feet in background*):

Hold! Who comes to Spain?

JAMES (*off stage, in the thicket above to the right*):

To Spain or Mars, I little care!

I seek for orchids, and for moths, and rare  
Shy birds that covey on the alpine slopes.

SENTRY:

Hold, señor!

JAMES:

Hush, soldier! For I came in hopes  
To sprinkle shadows on the glen below—  
To camp, in short, and to mend a fire I know.

CORONADO:

Peace, sentry! Stranger, here there burns a fire;  
But few there are of mortals can aspire  
To stoke it or the more to make it glow,  
Though the world needs it.

JAMES (*enters. He is a scientist of 1820, imaginative, eager, unstunted by our present specialization; in climbing costume, with a hatful of flowers, a knapsack, a pistol, and a staff*):

There's a tree I know  
Grows hereabouts, and only here. It's dipped  
In silver, and with yellowing cones is tipped.  
Not sternest, no, nor loftiest of trees,  
But loved of all mankind—the silver spruce.  
Boughs plucked by understanding hands will loose  
Sweet flames from yonder fire.

*(He plucks a spruce bough and tosses it in. It kindles the fire to a crimson flame again.)*

CORONADO (*surprised*):

Who thus can make  
The fire of slumbering romance awake?

JAMES:

My name is James, a botanist—just James;  
A grubber after bugs and roots and names;  
Scorned by the world, but toiling to discern  
The magic hid in nature, flower and fern.

PIKE:

How came you here? Unwelcome fuel he feeds  
A fire whose nourishment is venturous deeds!

JAMES:

Say three men's lives ago, my friends, I came  
Into this wilderness, with Long, to claim  
The secrets from the hills, and read a tale  
Of endless wonderland in hill and dale.

CORONADO:

No man can read in trees and sodden soil  
What stirs his pulses and forgets his toil.  
Valor and venture and the blood of man  
Feed yonder fire.

JAMES:

Perhaps deeds can.

But man is an insect, and, with tiny fears,  
Creaks like a cricket into Nature's ears.  
Learn, then, the real romance that lifts mankind  
Out of the stumbling of the daily grind—  
The whirl of universes, and the might  
That spring can gather from mere gentle light,  
The ways of wild things and the soul of trees!  
These are the dramas and the tragedies.  
Such is the fuel that yonder altar-flare  
Devoured just now. I cast no bloodshed there.

CORONADO (*pondering*):

The fire did leap.

PIKE (*slowly*):

The fire did blaze.

CORONADO (*convinced*):

God wills  
Not only we should harvest from the hills,

And store that harvest for the world's delight.  
We know—

JAMES (*full of his subject, interrupting*):

Too little. World's delight, I say,  
Is finding what the world has hid away.

(*Picking flowers from his hat.*)

Look, soldiers! Who would prophesy  
A struggling surgeon, patientless, as I,  
With smattering of botany and dry,  
Circuitous names of rocks and strata stuff,  
Could meet a summons—just by a chance enough—  
To join a soldier in a silly task  
Of seeing a desert that the Congress ask,  
But build no hopes on; and then, journeying so,  
Could enter, just a hundred years ago,  
This house of magic, with a sky so new  
The raindrops wash away its turquoise blue  
And stain the blossoms with it?

(*Showing a blue columbine.*)

Days prepare  
When men and children, who are unaware  
That swords or soldiers ever had their hour,  
Will find a sacrament within this flower!  
Men call it columbine, a mountain dove.  
I say—sky-crystal, shattered from above  
By thunder. Camp-mates of the darkness, tell,  
How come you by a fire I know so well?

CORONADO (*pompously*):

Francisco Vasquez Coronado, sir,  
Captain of Spain and Spain's adventurer!  
The fire is mine.

JAMES:

I know the tale.

PIKE:

And I

Am Zebulon Pike, who came as you.

JAMES:

You lie!

(Drawing his pistol.)

I serve my country's honor. You betrayed  
The uniform you wear, and westward made  
A trail for treason.

CORONADO:

What is this?

PIKE (*sadly*):

A tale.

CORONADO:

No taint shall touch my embers, or the pale,  
Sweet wreaths distilled there.

JAMES:

All men know  
This creature ventured west to serve the low  
Designs of Aaron Burr, and to divide  
His country, and to butcher from its side  
A western hostile empire.

CORONADO:

Better spoil  
My blaze, and leave to shadow and to toil  
The world, than taint its ruddy glow  
With treason! Guards!

(*Cardenas, Castaneda, Marcos and the soldiers sleeping in the shadows leap from the background and seize Pike.*)

PIKE (*after a fruitless struggle*):

Señor, withhold your arms!  
Yon dreamer cannot prove his charge. He harms  
A dumb-proud memory with gossip.

JAMES:

No!

CORONADO:

Glory is gossip, if you name it so.  
Only report and legend, they are fame.  
Gossip is all there is to feed that flame.  
It poisons what it feeds.

JAMES (*goes to kick the fire away*):

Come! Strew about  
The tainted embers! Let the fire go out,  
And us depart!

PIKE (*interfering*):

No, no! The charge is false—I swear 'tis so!  
Had I my papers left me, I could show  
That I toiled hither, loyal in heart and thought,  
Whate'er the powers who sent me may have sought.

JAMES:

What papers?

PIKE:

Oh, the documents I burned—  
The missing orders history never learned  
But built suspicion on.

CORONADO:

Before you came  
He fed the fire with papers.

JAMES (*startled*):

And the flame?

CORONADO:

The flame blazed high and clear.

JAMES:

As high and clean  
As when I cast my bough of evergreen?

CORONADO:

Yes, and for mine. And yet I know there springs  
No flicker of romance from sordid things.

PIKE (*to James*):

Would any man for self or treason bear  
Such agony of hunger?

JAMES (*hesitating*):

True, you wear  
The badge of courage.

PIKE:

Or with frozen feet  
Plow on to where the sky and mountain meet  
In whirlwinds, but to serve his country's will?  
Pike was no traitor. Let the fire burn still!

CORONADO (*half persuaded*):

Men die for nations who would not kneel down,  
Nor wait their food an hour to gain a crown.

(*Turning to a soldier holding Pike.*)

Soldier, you won, if I remember right,  
A mantle, cheating at the cards, one night.  
Cardenas whipped you. Give the mantle here!

(*The soldier hesitates.*)

Quick! All things come to Coronado's ear,  
And years avail not.

(*He snatches a scarf from the soldier's shoulder.*)

Holy Marcos, thou  
Hast somewhere hidden in thy vestments now  
A roll of parchment that purports as prayer.  
Surrender it! The pages of it bear  
A woman's name, and silly tokens prest  
To lover's lips.

MARCOS:

My Lord, I do protest!

(*Handing.*)

Peruse it!

CORONADO:

You know well I cannot trace  
The words. But trees can read a lover's face;  
And when, in prayer, you read these lines, they  
paint  
Hot sunsets on your temples—for a saint.

*(Turning to the fire, and holding the paper and scarf aloft.)*

Here's sacrilege! Such falseness tests the chance.  
If nought but pure devotion makes romance,  
The fire will slumber, and this lad prove true.  
But if it leaps, as common embers do,  
When fed such fuel, the stalwarts lived in vain,  
And Coronado seeks the tomb again.  
Eternal fire! Here's falseness and deceit,  
What say you?

*(He feeds the scarf and paper to the fire. They do not burn.)*

MARCOS:

God's Anointment, and the Sweet  
Protection of the Virgin, I confess!  
It's magic.

*(Crossing himself and falling on his knees. The soldiers cross themselves, startled, and retreat away.)*

CORONADO:

Yes, 'tis magic—nothing less!  
That ancient magic that the hills possess,  
The spell of open places, and the kiss  
Of mountains, and the awe of an abyss  
On human frailty.

JAMES (*with his hand on Pike's shoulder*):

Pike survives the test.

CORONADO:

Go, Marcos, and the others, to your rest!  
Sweet slumbers! for the watch tonight is kept  
By three who fail not. Tyre and Ilium slept  
Guarded no better.

*(Marcos, the officers and soldiers, in awe, depart into the shadows.)*

JAMES (*gathering the other two around the fire*):

Such watchmen for the world  
Patrolled the sheep-folds when the night unfurled  
In Asia; on its banner a bold star  
That led those shepherds westward; and afar  
They found a manger!

PIKE:

Aye, such watchmen pace  
O'er crowded cities everywhere, and place  
In hands of sleeping children gorgeous dreams  
That tint the walls of squalor.

JAMES:

Watchmen so  
Must tend the cross-roads, that the world may go  
Not hurrying and lanternless astray.

PIKE:

Come comrades! While we watch the night away,  
We'll build the flames to mount the hills and shed  
On tardy mortals plodding home to bed.

*(There are shouts in the darkness down the creek bottom to the left, and parts of a song.)*

## SONG:

Shovel away, then tramp all day,  
And shovel again awhile!  
Hopin' every creek will open up a streak  
O' glory in a gravel bed  
An' make your little pile.  
Live on flapperjacks an' hope;  
Never see a bed or soap; pullin' on a halter-rope  
A burro every mile!  
Mighty queer to me that you ever see  
An old prospector smile!

(Refrain)

Hi, Jenny! Hi, Jenny,  
Get up an' hike.  
Sure in the gulch ahead  
We'll make a strike.  
I'll own an op'ry-house,  
You'll feed on hay,  
Carrots and angel-cake,  
Three times a day!

JACKSON (*below to the left*):

Hey, Kit! Hey, Drum! The daw-gone critters! Kit!  
That there's a porcupine! Come out of it!  
Law, fifty million cotton-tails, and still  
Every last one needs chasing up the hill!  
Old-timer, you might jest as well go set  
And rest! Won't see them dogs till daylight yet!

*(He is heard to unload his pack and resume his song.)*

CORONADO (*challenging*):

Hold! Who goes to Spain?

JACKSON:

To Spain? Who goes to church? How should I know?

I'll make Auraria, perhaps, if it don't snow,  
By springtime. Pardner, who the hell are you?

CORONADO:

The shadows stir with strangers—old and new  
Invaders. Sentry, shout to yonder song,  
And bid it clothe itself and come along.

SENTRY (*shouting, from the grove beside the stage*):

Coronado bids you come and share  
His campfire!

JACKSON (*climbing into sight up the creek*):

Well, a campfire's mighty rare  
In these parts. Pleased to jine you, till my hounds  
Quit treein' the moonbeams! Maybe there's some  
grounds  
Of coffee in your pot? Been stewin' mine  
So many times, it's faded.

(*Jackson, a prospector with a tin cup, a belt, ax,  
knife, and gun, enters. Aside, seeing Coronado*):  
Holy smoke!

The Prince of Whales!

CORONADO (*loftily*):

Perhaps the guard who spoke  
Above there has a draft to quench your heat.  
Go seek him. He will share his bison meat.  
We dine not.

JACKSON:

Thanks, your Grace! But let it go!  
I baked a beaver by the creek below.

(*Aside.*)

'Taint manners, no, nor safe, to ask, I guess,  
The names of them that trail the wilderness.

(*He stands by the fire warming his hands, sets down his gun and pack, but recovers and conceals a buckskin bag.*)

CORONADO:

You wander late.

JACKSON:

I what? Oh, sure I do!  
We built a cabin—me and t'other two—  
Down by the two flat hills, just where the creek  
Gits tired of fallin' down and starts to sneak  
Thin down the prairie. Like as not you saw  
The roof, a-comin' up here. No? This thaw  
Maybe set up the creek a-boomin', and the shack  
Is floatin' round Missou' till I get back.  
That's where my folks are. Jackson is my name.

JAMES:

I knew an Andrew Jackson. Any kin?

JACKSON:

Don't know him, but it's like as not have been.  
Kit Carson is my cousin. Well, we come  
A-huntin' elk one day—just Kit and Drum,  
My dogs, and those two other men, and me;  
And elk was plenty, but I ached to see

The hills. I left them up here in a park  
Of pines, a-shootin', and I waded snow  
Till I came stumbling' on the creek below,  
'Bout one day's travelin' up.

(*Aside.*)

Come pretty near  
A-tellin' what I saw.

(*Aloud.*)

And so I'm here.  
Starved back to home, 'most frozen. And next week  
I guess I'll travel down to Cherry Creek  
And see the traders.

CORONADO:

Pike, toss yonder sticks!

JACKSON:

Have you folks got a paper? 'Fifty-six—  
Two years ago—the last one that I see.  
I'll stir the fire, sir.

(*He is about to mend it.*)

JAMES (*protesting*):

Let the blazes be!

CORONADO:

That fire is sacred, like the place we sit.  
Boughs you could heap would never kindle it.

JACKSON:

Well, what the —! Pardner, any man's as good  
As any other in the open wood.

CORONADO (*drawing his sword*):

Profane the fire, and I will make you feel  
The Spanish blade! Nay, as in old Castile  
They cleanse the heretics, to yonder tree  
I'll bind and burn you to humility.  
Depart!

JACKSON (*defiant, but awed*):

I'll go, old greaser! But I'll throw  
A log or two on yonder, just to show  
I ain't alarmed particular.

(*He stoops for a log; raises it. Coronado flourishes his sword, but James catches Coronado's uplifted arm and holds it.*)

JAMES:

Withhold!

I'll teach him gently.

(*Drawing Jackson to the fire.*)

Hunter in the urn  
Of those hot embers, what do you discern?

JACKSON (*gazing appalled; then slowly, after a pause*):

I see three little high-decked ships that breast  
Seas far too tall; a figure leaning west  
Upon a prow, alone with waves. The ash  
Falls inward. Now from another ocean dash  
Big headlong breakers, and an armored man  
Stands on a headland, tattered and dismayed  
At such a strange wide sea, but unafraid.  
Now soldiers toiling over heated sand,  
And rows of grave-mounds in a thirsty land.

CORONADO:

See how the blazes to a banner spread  
Their gold and crimson! Gone! With flames of red  
And starry sparks, another flag of blue  
Flame flutters in the smoke. What's this? What  
new  
Flag veils the flag of Spain?

JAMES (*to Jackson*):

Have your hands made

A fire that marched such visions in parade?

JACKSON (*puzzled*):

No, I will go.

JAMES:

'Tis better.

(*Jackson reverently gathers his gun and pack, and then thoughtfully begins to climb up into shadowy background. Suddenly he wheels, drops his load and, filled with understanding, marches back to the fire where the others still stand.*)

JACKSON:

Wait! Around

A little fir tree in the gorge I found  
An amulet that makes men bold. I lit  
A fire upon a gravel bed, and it  
Thawed out the pebbles; and I scooped and panned  
Nine treaty-cups; and, yellowing in the sand,  
When I poured out the cup, was gold!

(*He drops his cap, takes a little sack from his belt, and pours through his fingers a stream of gold dust.*)

Gold! Though I meant to keep the secret, show,  
My gold, what images of men you throw  
Into the fire!

*(He throws in the gold dust. The flame mounts high and red, illuminating the forest. For a moment all observe the conflagration in awe.)*

CORONADO:

Yea, stranger, till the world is ashen old  
Romance will leap to flame for love and gold.

JAMES:

I see the play of commerce in the flare—  
The ox-teams, cities building, and the glare  
Of furnaces—the pride of industry  
That heartens men.

CORONADO:

Fire of eternity!

Blaze on! The years have fagots they provide  
To mend the altar fires they love. Abide!

*(There is a halloo in the distance. Then another.)*

*The figures, except the sleeping Boy Scout, become indistinct as the light centers on him. The fire sinks again to embers and a thread of smoke. The boy wakes, rubs his eyes, and recognizes the voice. He gradually realizes that he is found by a rescue party. Half rising, his gaze searches the glen for the figures of his vision, but he finds only grotesque shadows. He gains his feet, hears another faint call and*

*starts uncertainly up the stream. When half way up the hill he remembers that he has forgotten his treasures; runs back; gathers helmet, cup, gun-stock, and horns in his arms, and disappears in dusk at the back.*

*Silence and darkness. Then the glow of the swamp-lights and the same voice as before the figures appeared.*

#### A VOICE IN THE TREES:

Once in the ages, torn by his lot,  
Gay Coronado left and forgot  
One Spanish sentry high on a hill.  
That Spanish sentry watches there still.  
Down through the ages, last of his host,  
That Spanish soldier clings to his post.  
Sudden, one evening, twinkle and glow  
Lights of a city clustered below!

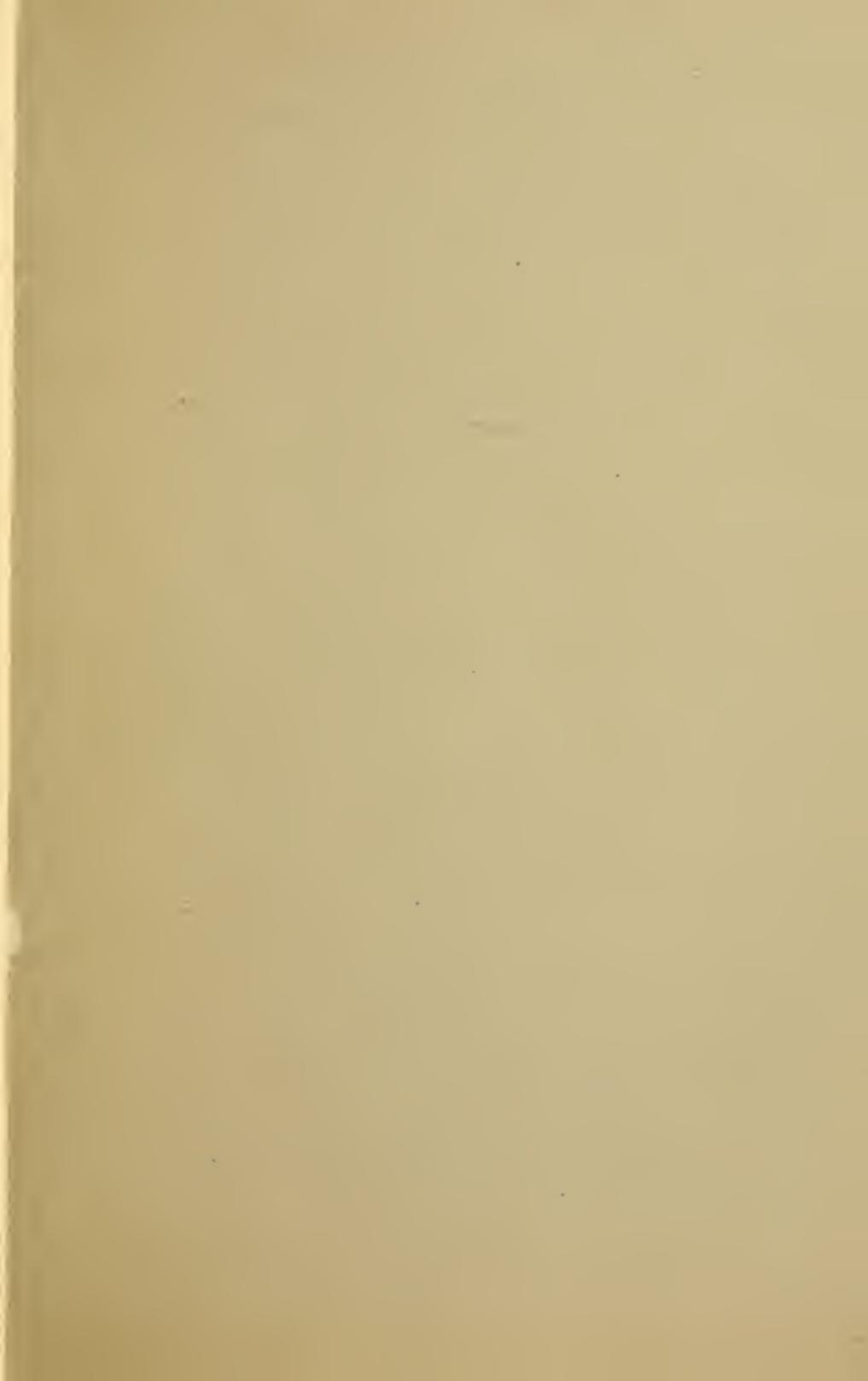
“Ah,” said the sentry, “fireflies, I think,  
Gather the sweets of some meadow to drink.”  
So thought the sentry, till, from the dust,  
Up through the pine trees came one little gust.  
“Soldier,” it whispered, “scattered by chance,  
These are the coals of the Fire of Romance!”

*The music wanes. The green glow sinks, and the chanting voice trails off in a repetition of the last two lines. The artificial lights which only have made the glen a stage, die out. The audience is left in the woods.*

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